**Ode to the Cat by Pablo Neruda**

There was something wrong   
with the animals:   
their tails were too long, and they had   
unfortunate heads.   
Then they started coming together,   
little by little   
fitting together to make a landscape,   
developing birthmarks, grace, flight.   
But the cat,   
only the cat   
turned out finished,   
and proud:  
Follow up:  
born in a state of total completion,   
it sticks to itself and knows exactly what it wants.   
Men would like to be fish or fowl,   
snakes would rather have wings,   
and dogs are would-be lions.   
Engineers want to be poets,   
flies emulate swallows,   
and poets try hard to act like flies.   
But the cat   
wants nothing more than to be a cat,   
and every cat is pure cat   
from its whiskers to its tail,   
from sixth sense to squirming rat,   
from nighttime to its golden eyes.   
Nothing hangs together   
quite like a cat:   
neither flowers nor the moon   
have   
such consistency.   
It's a thing by itself,   
like the sun or a topaz,   
and the elastic curve of its back,   
which is both subtle and confident,   
is like the curve of a sailing ship's prow.   
The cat's yellow eyes   
are the only   
slot   
for depositing the coins of night.   
O little   
emperor without a realm,   
conqueror without a homeland,   
diminutive parlor tiger, nuptial   
sultan of heavens   
roofed in erotic tiles:   
when you pass   
in rough weather   
and poise   
four nimble paws   
on the ground,   
sniffing,   
suspicious   
of all earthly things   
(because everything   
feels filthy   
to the cat's immaculate paw),   
you claim   
the touch of love in the air.   
O freelance household   
beast, arrogant   
vestige of night,   
lazy, agile   
and strange,   
O fathomless cat,   
secret police   
of human chambers   
and badge   
of burnished velvet!   
Surely there is nothing   
enigmatic   
in your manner,   
maybe you aren't a mystery after all.   
You're known to everyone, you belong   
to the least mysterious tenant.   
Everyone may believe it,   
believe they're master,   
owner, uncle   
or companion   
to a cat,   
some cat's colleague,   
disciple or friend.   
But not me.   
I'm not a believer.   
I don't know a thing about cats.   
I know everything else, including life and its archipelago,   
seas and unpredictable cities,   
plant life,   
the pistil and its scandals,   
the pluses and minuses of math.   
I know the earth's volcanic protrusions   
and the crocodile's unreal hide,   
the fireman's unseen kindness   
and the priest's blue atavism.   
But cats I can't figure out.   
My mind slides on their indifference.   
Their eyes hold ciphers of gold.

**Ode to a Bar of Soap**by Pablo Neruda

**When I pick up  
a bar  
of soap  
to take a closer look,  
its powerful aroma  
astounds me:  
O fragrance,  
I don’t know  
where you come from,  
–what  
is your home town?  
Did my cousin send you  
or did you come from clean clothes   
and the hands that washed them,  
splotchy from the cold basin?  
Did you come from those  
lilacs  
I remember so well,  
from the amaranth’s  
blossom,  
from green plums  
clinging to a branch?  
Have you come from the playing field  
and a quick swim  
beneath the  
trembling  
willows?  
Is yours the aroma of thickets  
or of young love or birthday  
cakes? Or is yours the smell  
of a dampened heart?   
What is it that you bring  
to my nose  
so early  
every day,  
bar of soap,  
before I climb into my morning  
bath  
and go into the streets  
among men weighed down  
with goods?  
What is this smell of people,  
a faint smell,  
of petticoat  
flowers,  
the honey of woodland girls?  
Or is it  
the old  
half forgotten  
air of a  
five-  
and-ten,  
the heavy white fabric  
a peasant holds in his hands,  
rich thickness  
of molasses, or the red carnation**

**that lay on my aunt’s  
sideboard  
like a lightning-bolt of red,  
like a red arrow?  
Do I detect  
your pungent odor  
in cut-rate  
dry goods and unforgettable  
cologne, in barbershops  
and the clean countryside,  
in sweet water?  
This is what  
you are,  
soap: you are pure delight,  
the passing fragrance  
that slithers  
and sinks like a  
blind fish  
to the bottom of the bathtub.**

**Ode to a Pair of Socks**

**By Pablo Neruda**

Maru Mori brought me  
a pair  
of socks  
that she knit with her  
shepherd's hands.  
Two socks as soft  
as rabbit fur.  
I thrust my feet  
inside them  
as if they were  
two  
little boxes  
knit  
from threads  
of sunset  
and sheepskin.

My feet were  
two woolen  
fish  
in those outrageous socks,  
two gangly,  
navy-blue sharks  
impaled  
on a golden thread,  
two giant blackbirds,  
two cannons:  
thus  
were my feet  
honored  
by  
those  
heavenly  
socks.  
They were  
so beautiful  
I found my feet  
unlovable  
for the very first time,  
like two crusty old  
firemen, firemen  
unworthy  
of that embroidered  
fire,  
those incandescent  
socks.

Nevertheless  
I fought  
the sharp temptation  
to put them away  
the way schoolboys  
put  
fireflies in a bottle,  
the way scholars  
hoard  
holy writ.  
I fought  
the mad urge  
to lock them  
in a golden  
cage  
and feed them birdseed  
and morsels of pink melon  
every day.  
Like jungle  
explorers  
who deliver a young deer  
of the rarest species  
to the roasting spit  
then wolf it down  
in shame,  
I stretched  
my feet forward  
and pulled on  
those  
gorgeous  
socks,  
and over them  
my shoes.

So this is  
the moral of my ode:  
beauty is beauty  
twice over  
and good things are doubly  
good  
when you're talking about a pair of wool  
socks  
in the dead of winter.

### Ode to an Artichoke

~ Pablo Neruda

The artichoke  
of delicate heart  
erect  
in its battle-dress, builds  
its minimal cupola;  
keeps  
stark  
in its scallop of  
scales.  
Around it,  
demoniac vegetables  
bristle their thicknesses,  
devise  
tendrils and belfries,  
the bulb’s agitations;  
while under the subsoil  
the carrot  
sleeps sound in its  
rusty mustaches.  
Runner and filaments  
bleach in the vineyards,  
whereon rise the vines.  
The sedulous cabbage  
arranges its petticoats;  
oregano  
sweetens a world;  
and the artichoke  
dulcetly there in a gardenplot,  
armed for a skirmish,  
goes proud  
in its pomegranate  
burnishes.  
Till, on a day,  
each by the other,  
the artichoke moves  
to its dream  
of a market place

in the big willow  
hoppers:  
a battle formation.  
Most warlike  
of defilades-  
with men  
in the market stalls,  
white shirts  
in the soup-greens,  
artichoke field marshals,  
close-order conclaves,  
commands, detonations,  
and voices,  
a crashing of crate staves.

And  
Maria  
come  
down  
with her hamper  
to  
make trial  
of an artichoke:  
she reflects, she examines,  
she candles them up to the light like an egg,  
never flinching;  
she bargains,  
she tumbles her prize  
in a market bag  
among shoes and a  
cabbage head,  
a bottle  
of vinegar; is back  
in her kitchen.  
The artichoke drowns in a pot.

So you have it:  
a vegetable, armed,  
a profession  
(call it an artichoke)  
whose end  
is millennial.  
We taste of that  
sweetness,  
dismembering scale after scale.  
We eat of a halcyon paste:  
it is green at the artichoke heart.

Ode to Bread

By Pablo Neruda

Bread,   
you rise  
from flour,   
water  
and fire.  
Dense or light,  
flattened or round,  
you duplicate  
the mother's  
rounded womb,  
and earth's  
twice-yearly  
swelling.  
How simple  
you are, bread,  
and how profound!  
You line up  
on the baker's   
powdered trays  
like silverware or plates  
or pieces of paper  
and suddenly  
life washes   
over you,  
there's the joining of seed  
and fire,  
and you're growing, growing  
all at once  
like  
hips, mouths, breasts,  
mounds of earth,  
or people's lives.  
The temperature rises, you're overwhelmed  
by fullness, the roar  
of fertility,  
and suddenly   
your golden color is fixed.  
And when your little wombs  
were seeded,  
a brown scar  
laid its burn the length  
of your two halves'  
toasted  
juncture.  
Now,   
whole,  
you are   
mankind's energy,  
a miracle often admired,  
the will to live itself.  
  
O bread familiar to every mouth,  
we will not kneel before you:  
men  
do no  
implore  
unclear gods  
or obscure angels:  
we will make our own bread  
out of sea and soil,  
we will plant wheat  
on our earth and the planets,  
bread for every mouth,   
for every person,  
our daily bread.   
Because we plant its seed  
and grow it  
not for one man  
but for all,  
there will be enough:  
there will be bread  
for all the peoples of the earth.  
And we will also share with one another  
whatever has  
the shape and the flavor of bread:  
the earth itself,  
beauty  
and love--  
all  
taste like bread  
and have its shape,  
the germination of wheat.  
Everything  
exists to be shared,  
to be freely given,  
to multiply.  
  
This is why, bread,  
if you flee  
from mankind's houses,  
if they hide you away  
or deny you,  
if the greedy man  
pimps for you or   
the rich man   
takes you over,  
if the wheat  
does not yearn for the furrow and the soil:  
then, bread,   
we will refuse to pray:  
bread  
we will refuse to beg.  
We will fight for you instead, side by side with the others,  
with everyone who knows hunger.  
We will go after you  
in every river and in the air.  
We will divide the entire earth among ourselves  
so that you may germinate,  
and the earth will go forward  
with us:  
water, fire, and mankind  
fighting at our side.  
Crowned  
with sheafs of wheat,   
we will win  
earth and bread for everyone.  
Then   
life itself  
will have the shape of bread,  
deep and simple,   
immeasurable and pure.  
Every living thing  
will have its share  
of soil and life,  
and the bread we eat each morning,  
everyone's daily bread,  
will be hallowed  
and sacred,  
because it will have been won  
by the longest and costliest  
of human struggles.  
  
This earthly *Victory*  
does not have wings:  
she wears bread on her shoulders instead.  
Courageously she soars,  
setting the world free,  
like a baker  
born aloft on the wind.

**Ode To The Onion by Pablo Neruda**

Onion,  
luminous flask,  
your beauty formed  
petal by petal,  
crystal scales expanded you  
and in the secrecy of the dark earth  
your belly grew round with dew.  
Under the earth  
the miracle  
happened  
and when your clumsy  
green stem appeared,  
and your leaves were born  
like swords  
in the garden,  
the earth heaped up her power  
showing your naked transparency,  
and as the remote sea  
in lifting the breasts of Aphrodite  
duplicating the magnolia,  
so did the earth  
make you,  
onion  
clear as a planet  
and destined  
to shine,  
constant constellation,  
round rose of water,  
upon  
the table  
of the poor.  
  
You make us cry without hurting us.  
I have praised everything that exists,  
but to me, onion, you are  
more beautiful than a bird  
of dazzling feathers,  
heavenly globe, platinum goblet,  
unmoving dance  
of the snowy anemone  
  
and the fragrance of the earth lives  
in your crystalline nature.

**Ode To The Lemon by Pablo Neruda**

From blossoms  
released  
by the moonlight,  
from an  
aroma of exasperated  
love,  
steeped in fragrance,  
yellowness  
drifted from the lemon tree,  
and from its plantarium  
lemons descended to the earth.  
  
Tender yield!  
The coasts,  
the markets glowed  
with light, with  
unrefined gold;  
we opened  
two halves  
of a miracle,  
congealed acid  
trickled  
from the hemispheres  
of a star,  
the most intense liqueur  
of nature,  
unique, vivid,  
concentrated,  
born of the cool, fresh  
lemon,  
of its fragrant house,  
its acid, secret symmetry.  
  
Knives  
sliced a small  
cathedral  
in the lemon,  
the concealed apse, opened,  
revealed acid stained glass,  
drops  
oozed topaz,  
altars,  
cool architecture.  
  
So, when you hold  
the hemisphere  
of a cut lemon  
above your plate,  
you spill  
a universe of gold,  
a  
yellow goblet  
of miracles,  
a fragrant nipple  
of the earth's breast,  
a ray of light that was made fruit,  
the minute fire of a planet.

**Ode To Maize by Pablo Neruda**

America, from a grain  
of maize you grew  
to crown  
with spacious lands  
the ocean foam.  
A grain of maize was your geography.  
From the grain  
a green lance rose,  
was covered with gold,  
to grace the heights  
of Peru with its yellow tassels.  
  
But, poet, let  
history rest in its shroud;  
praise with your lyre  
the grain in its granaries:  
sing to the simple maize in the kitchen.  
  
First, a fine beard  
fluttered in the field  
above the tender teeth  
of the young ear.  
Then the husks parted  
and fruitfulness burst its veils  
of pale papyrus  
that grains of laughter  
might fall upon the earth.  
To the stone,  
in your journey,  
you returned.  
Not to the terrible stone,  
the bloody  
triangle of Mexican death,  
but to the grinding stone,  
sacred  
stone of your kitchens.  
There, milk and matter,  
strength-giving, nutritious  
cornmeal pulp,  
you were worked and patted  
by the wondrous hands  
of dark-skinned women.  
  
Wherever you fall, maize,  
whether into the  
splendid pot of partridge, or among  
country beans, you light up  
the meal and lend it  
your virginal flavor.  
  
Oh, to bite into  
the steaming ear beside the sea  
of distant song and deepest waltz.  
To boil you  
as your aroma  
spreads through  
blue sierras.  
  
But is there  
no end  
to your treasure?  
  
In chalky, barren lands  
bordered  
by the sea, along  
the rocky Chilean coast,  
at times  
only your radiance  
reaches the empty  
table of the miner.  
  
Your light, your cornmeal, your hope  
pervades America's solitudes,  
and to hunger  
your lances  
are enemy legions.  
  
Within your husks,  
like gentle kernels,  
our sober provincial  
children's hearts were nurtured,  
until life began  
to shuck us from the ear.

## *Ode to Tomatoes*

#### (translated by Margaret Sayers Peden)

**The street  
filled with tomatoes  
midday,  
summer,  
light is  
halved  
like  
a  
tomato,  
its juice  
runs  
through the streets.  
In December,  
unabated,  
the tomato  
invades  
the kitchen,  
it enters at lunchtime,  
takes  
its ease  
on countertops,  
among glasses,  
butter dishes,  
blue saltcellars.  
It sheds  
its own light,  
benign majesty.  
Unfortunately, we must  
murder it:  
the knife  
sinks  
into living flesh,  
red  
viscera,  
a cool  
sun,  
profound,  
inexhausible,  
populates the salads  
of Chile,  
happily, it is wed  
to the clear onion,  
and to celebrate the union  
we  
pour  
oil,  
essential  
child of the olive,  
onto its halved hemispheres,  
pepper  
adds  
its fragrance,  
salt, its magnetism;  
it is the wedding  
of the day,  
parsley  
hoists  
its flag,  
potatoes  
bubble vigorously,  
the aroma  
of the roast  
knocks   
at the door,  
it's time!  
come on!  
and, on   
the table, at the midpoint  
of summer,  
the tomato,  
star of earth,  
recurrent  
and fertile  
star,  
displays  
its convolutions,  
its canals,  
its remarkable amplitude  
and abundance,  
no pit,  
no husk,  
no leaves or thorns,  
the tomato offers  
its gift  
of fiery color  
and cool completeness.**

Ode to Olive Oil by Pablo Neruda

Near the murmuring   
In the grain fields, of the waves   
Of wind in the oat-stalks   
The olive tree   
With its silver-covered mass   
Severe in its lines   
In its twisted   
Heart in the earth:   
The graceful   
Olives   
Polished   
By the hands   
Which made   
The dove   
And the oceanic   
Snail:   
Green,   
Innumerable,   
Immaculate   
Nipples   
Of nature   
And there   
In   
The dry   
Olive Groves   
Where   
Alone   
The blue sky with cicadas   
And the hard earth   
Exist   
There   
The prodigy   
The perfect   
Capsules   
Of the olives   
Filling   
With their constellations, the foliage   
Then later,   
The bowls,   
The miracle,   
The olive oil.   
I love   
The homelands of olive oil   
The olive groves   
Of Chacabuco, in Chile   
In the morning   
Feathers of platinum   
Forests of them   
Against the wrinkled   
Mountain ranges.   
In Anacapri, up above,   
Over the light of the Italian sea   
Is the despair of olive trees   
And on the map of Europe   
Spain   
A black basketfull of olives   
Dusted off by orange blossoms   
As if by a sea breeze   
Olive oil,   
The internal supreme   
Condition for the cooking pot   
Pedestal for game birds   
Heavenly key to mayonnaise   
Smooth and tasty   
Over the lettuce   
And supernatural in the hell   
Of the king mackerals like archbishops   
Our chorus   
With   
Intimate   
Powerful smoothness   
You sing:   
You are the Spanish   
Lnaguage   
There are syllables of olive oil   
There are words   
Useful and rich-smelling   
Like your fragrant material   
It's not only wine that sings   
Olive oil sings too   
It lives in us with its ripe light   
And among the good things of the earth   
I set apart   
Olive oil,   
Your ever-flowing peace, your green essence   
Your heaped-up treasure which descends   
In streams from the olive tree.

Ode to Clothing by Pablo Neruda

Each morning you’re waiting   
My clothing, on a chair   
For me to fill you   
With my vanity, my love   
My hope, my body   
I hardly   
Have gotten out of sleep   
I say goodbye to the water   
I enter into your sleeves   
My legs look for   
The hollowness of your legs   
And so embraced   
By your tireless faithfulness   
I go out to walk in the grass   
I enter into poetry   
I look through windows   
At things   
Men, women,   
Deeds and struggles   
Keep forming me   
Keep coming against me   
Laboring with my hands   
Opening my eyes   
Using up my mouth   
And so,   
Clothing,   
I also keep forming you   
Poking out your elbows   
Snapping your threads   
And so your life grows   
Into the image of my live.   
In the wind   
You ripple and rustle   
As if you were my soul.   
In bad minutes   
You stick   
To my bones   
Empty, through the night   
Darkness, sleep   
Populate with their fantasies   
Your wings and mine.   
I ask   
If one day   
A bullet   
From the enemy   
Might leave a spot of my blood on you   
And then   
You would die with me   
Or maybe   
It won’t all be   
So dramatic  
But simple   
And you’ll just get feeble,   
Clothing,  
With me  
Growing old   
With me, with my body   
And together   
We will enter   
The earth.   
That’s why   
Every day   
I greet you   
With reverence and then   
You embrace me and I forget you   
Because we are just one   
And we’ll keep going on together   
Against the wind, in the night   
The streets, or the struggle   
One single body   
Maybe, maybe, some time will be immobile.

Ode to the Piano

by Pablo Neruda, translated by Jodey Bateman

The piano was sad  
during the concert,  
forgotten in its gravedigger's coat,  
and then it opened its mouth,  
its whale's mouth:  
the pianist entered the piano  
flying like a crow;  
something happened as if a stone  
of silver fell  
or a hand  
into a hidden  
pond:  
the sweetness slid  
like rain  
over a bell,  
the light fell to the bottom  
of a locked house,  
an emerald went across the abyss  
and the sea sounded,  
the night,  
the meadows,  
the dewdrop,  
the deepest thunder,  
the structure of the rose sang,  
the milk of dawn surrounded the silence.  
  
That's how the music was born  
from the piano which was dying,  
the garment  
of the water-nymph  
moved up over the coffin  
and from its set of teeth  
all unaware  
the piano, the pianist  
and the concert fell,  
and everything became sound,  
an elemental torrent,  
a pure system, a clear bell ringing.  
  
Then the man returned  
from the tree of music.  
He flew down like  
a lost crow  
or a crazy knight:  
the piano closed its whale's mouth  
and the pianist walked back from it  
towards the silence.

Ode to the Spoon by Pablo Neruda

Spoon,

scoop

formed

by man's

most ancient hand,

in your design

of metal or of wood

we still see

the shape

of the first

palm

to which

water

imparted

coolness

and savage

blood,

the throb

of bonfires and the hunt.

Little

spoon

in an

infant's

tiny hand,

you raise

to his mouth

the earth's

most

ancient

kiss,

silent heritage

of the first water to sing

on lips that later lay

buried beneath the sand.

To this hollow space,

detached from the palm of our hand,

someone

added

a make-believe wooden

arm,

and spoons

started turning up

all over the world

in ever

more

perfect

form,

spoons made for

moving

between bowl and ruby-red lips

or flying

from thin soups

to hungry men's careless mouths.

Yes,

spoon:

at mankind's side

you have climbed

mountains,

swept down rivers,

populated

ships and cities,

castles and kitchens:

but

the hard part

of your life's journey

is to plunge

into the poor man's plate,

and into his mouth.

And so the coming

of the new life that,

fighting and singing,

we preach,

will be a coming of soup bowls,

a perfect panoply

of spoons.

An ocean of steam rising from pots

in a world

without hunger,

and a total mobilization of spoons,

will shed light where once was darkness

shining on plates spread all over the table

like contented flowers.

Ode to Salt by Pablo Neruda

This salt

in the salt cellar

I once saw in the salt mines.

I know

you won't

believe me

but

it sings

salt sings, the skin

of the salt mines

sings

with a mouth smothered

by the earth.

I shivered in those

solitudes

when I heard

the voice

of

the salt

in the desert.

Near Antofagasta

the nitrous

pampa

resounds:

a

broken

voice,

a mournful

song.

In its caves

the salt moans, mountain

of buried light,

translucent cathedral,

crystal of the sea, oblivion

of the waves.

And then on every table

in the world,

salt,

we see your piquant

powder

sprinkling

vital light

upon

our food.

Preserver

of the ancient

holds of ships,

discoverer

on

the high seas,

earliest

sailor

of the unknown, shifting

byways of the foam.

Dust of the sea, in you

the tongue receives a kiss

from ocean night:

taste imparts to every seasoned

dish your ocean essence;

the smallest,

miniature

wave from the saltcellar

reveals to us

more than domestic whiteness;

in it, we taste finitude.

Ode to the Chair by Pablo Neruda

One chair, alone in the jungle.

In the vines' tight grip

a sacred tree groans.

Other vines spiral skyward,

bloodspattered creatures

howl deep within the shadows,

giant leaves drop from the green sky.

A snake shakes

the dry rattles on its tail,

a bird flashes through the foliage

like an arrow aimed at a flag

while the branches shoulder their violins.

Squatting on their flowers,

insects

pray without stirring.

Our feet sink

in

the black weeds

of the jungle sea,

in clouds fallen from the forest canopy,

and all I ask

for the foreigner,

for the despairing scout,

is a seat

in the sitting-tree,

a throne

of unkempt velvet,

the plush of an overstuffed chair

torn up by the snaking vines -

for the man who goes on foot,

a chair

that embraces everything,

the sound

ground and

supreme

dignity

of repose!

Get behind me, thirsty tigers

and swarms of bloodsucking flies –

behind me, black morass

of ghostly fronds,

greasy waters,

leaves the color of rust,

deathless snakes.

Bring me a chair

in the midst of

thunder,

a chair for me

and for everyone

not only

to relieve

an exhausted body but

for

every purpose

and for every person,

for squandered strength

and for meditation.

War is as vast as the shadowy jungle.

A single chair

is

the first sign

of

peace.

Ode to Wood by Pablo Neruda

Oh, of all I know

and know well,

of all things,

wood

is my best friend.

I wear through the world

on my body, in my clothing,

the scent

of the sawmill,

the odor of red wood.

My heart, my senses,

were saturated

in my childhood

with the smell of trees

that fell in great forests

filled with future building.

I heard when they scourged

the gigantic

larch,

the forty-meter laurel.

The ax and the wedge

of the tiny woodsman begin to bite into

the haughty column;

man conquers and the

aromatic column falls,

the earth trembles, mute

thunder, a black sob

of roots, and then

a wave

of forest odors

flooded my senses.

It was in my childhood, on

distant, damp earth

in the forests of the south,

in fragrant green

archipelagoes;

I saw

roof beams born,

railroad ties

dense as iron,

slim and resonant boards.

The saw squealed,

singing

of its steely love,

the keen band whined,

the metallic lament

of the saw cutting

the loaf of the forest,

a mother in birth throes

giving birth in the midst

of the light,

of the woods,

ripping open the womb

of nature,

producing

castles of wood,

houses for man,

schools, coffins,

tables and ax handles.

Everything

in the forest

lies sleeping

beneath moist leaves,

then

a man

begins

driving in the wedge

and hefting the ax

to hack at the pure

solemnity of the tree,

and the tree

falls,

thunder and fragrance fall

so that from them will be born

structures, forms,

buildings,

from the hands of the man.

I know you, I love you,

I saw you born, wood.

That's why

when I touch you

you respond

like a lover,

you show me

your eyes and your grain,

your knots, your blemishes,

your veins

like frozen rivers.

I know

the song

they sang

on the voice of the wind,

I hear

a stormy night,

the galloping

of a horse through deep woods,

I touch you and you open

like a faded rose

that revives for me alone,

offering

an aroma and fire

that had seemed dead.

Beneath

sordid paint

I divine your pores,

choked, you call to me

and I hear you,

I feel

the shuddering

of trees that shaded

and amazed my childhood,

I see

emerge from you

like a soaring wave

28

or dove

wings of books,

tomorrow s

paper

for man,

pure paper for the pure man

who will live tomorrow

and who today is being born

to the sound of a saw,

to a tearing

of light, sound, and blood.

In the sawmill

of time

dark forests fall,

dark

is born

man,

black leaves fall,

and thunder threatens,

death and life

speak at once

and like a violin rises

the song, the lament,

of the saw in the forest,

and so wood is born

and begins to travel the

world,

until becoming a silent builder

cut and pierced by steel,

until it suffers and protects,

building

the dwelling

where every day

man, wife, and life

will come together.

***Ode to Laziness by Pablo Neruda***

Yesterday I felt this ode  
would not get off the floor.  
It was time, I ought  
at least  
show a green leaf.  
I scratch the earth: “Arise,  
sister ode  
—said to her—  
I have promised you,  
do not be afraid of me,  
I am not going to crush you,  
four-leaf ode,  
four-hand ode,  
you shall have tea with me.  
Arise,  
I am going to crown you among the odes,  
we shall go out together along the shores  
of the sea, on a bicycle.”  
It was no use.  
  
Then,  
on the pine peaks,  
laziness  
appeared in the nude,  
she led me dazzled  
and sleepy,  
she showed me upon the sand  
small broken bits  
of ocean substance,  
wood, algae, pebbles,  
feathers of sea birds.  
I looked for but did not find  
yellow agates.  
The sea  
filled all spaces  
crumbling towers,  
invading  
successive catastrophes of the foam.  
Alone on the sand  
spread wide  
its corolla.  
I saw the silvery petrels crossing  
and like black creases  
the cormorants  
nailed to the rocks.  
I released a bee  
that was agonizing in a spider’s nest.  
I put a little pebble  
in my pocket,  
it was smooth, very smooth  
as the breast of a bird,  
meanwhile on the shore,  
all afternoon  
sun struggled with mist.  
At times  
the mist was steeped  
in thought,  
topaz-like,  
at others fell  
a ray from the moist sun  
distilling yellow drops.  
  
At night,  
thinking of the duties of my fugitive ode,  
I pull off my shoes  
near the fire;  
sand slid out of them  
and soon I began to fall  
asleep.

**Ode to the Bee**

Pablo Neruda

Plentiness of the bee!  
Coming and going   
from orange, blue and yellow  
from the softest softness of the world -  
she hastily enters on business the flower crown  
and exits with golden coat and yellow boots.

 Perfect with a waist of lines of dark bands  
 with tiny always busy head and watery wings  
she enters scented windows, opens silken doors  
enters the sanctum of the most fragrant love,  
stumbles over small droplets of diamond dew   
and from all visited houses she takes mysterious honey,   
rich and heavy, of dense fragrance   
and liquid light that falls down in drops   
until she reaches the bee palace  
and deposes the product of the flower, of the flight  
and of the seraphic, secret sun.

Plentiness of the bee!  
 Sacred elevation of the unity,  
palpitating school!

 Sonorous buzzing multitudes that tune the nectar   
 passing swiftly drops of ambrosia -  
it is the siesta of the summer of green and of the solitudes of Osorno.  
Above the sun stitches his lances in the snow, lighting the volcanoes   
wide as the oceans is the earth, blue is the space  
but  there is something trembling,  
it is the burning heart of the summer  
the heart of multiplied honey,   
the noisy bee in the living comb of golden flights.

 Bees, pure selfless workers,  
 thin, flashing proletarians, perfect fearsome militia   
that in war attack with suicidal stings  
buzz, buzz over the earth’s realms  
family of gold, windy multitudes  
shake the fire of the flowers  
the thirst of the stamens  
the sharp thread of fragrances  
that unite the days and make the honey  
surpassing the wet continents  
and the farthest islands of the sky of the West

 Yes:  
Let the wax raise green statues  
let the honey overflow in infinite tongues  
let the ocean be a comb  
and the Earth be a tower and tunic of flowers  
Let the world be a cascade,   
magnificent head of hair,   
unceasing growth of Beedom!

Ode to Bicycles by Pablo Neruda

I was walking  
down  
a sizzling road:  
the sun popped like  
a field of blazing maize,  
the  
earth  
was hot,  
an infinite circle  
with an empty  
blue sky overhead.  
  
A few bicycles  
passed  
me by,  
the only  
insects  
in  
that dry  
moment of summer,  
silent,  
swift,  
translucent;  
they  
barely stirred  
the air.  
  
Workers and girls  
were riding to their  
factories,  
giving  
their eyes  
to summer,  
their heads to the sky,  
sitting on the  
hard  
beetle backs  
of the whirling  
bicycles  
that whirred  
as they rode by  
bridges, rosebushes, brambles  
and midday.

I thought about evening when  
the boys  
wash up,  
sing, eat, raise  
a cup  
of wine  
in honor  
of love  
and life,  
and waiting  
at the door,  
the bicycle,  
stilled,  
because  
only moving  
does it have a soul,  
and fallen there  
it isn't  
a translucent insect  
humming  
through summer  
but  
a cold  
skeleton  
that will return to  
life  
only  
when it's needed,  
when it's light,  
that is,  
with  
the  
resurrection  
of each day.

|  |
| --- |
| Ode to the Numbers  **by Pablo Neruda** |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  | Such thirst to know how much! Such hunger to know how many stars in the sky!  We pass our infancies counting stones, plants, fingers, sand grains, teeth, pass our youths counting petals, hairs. We count the color and the years, the lives and kisses, bulls in the fields, waves in the sea. The ships made ciphers which multiplied. The numbers spawned. The cities were thousands, millions, and the wheat came in hundreds of units each holding other integers tinier than a single grain. Time became a number. Light became numbered and however much it raced with sound it had a velocity of 37. Numbers surround us, At night we would lock the door, exhausted, approaching 800; below having come to bed with us in that sleep the 4,000 and the 77 goaded our foreheads with their wrenches and hammers. The 5 would compound itself until it entered the sea or the delirium where the sun might greet it with steel and we co racing to the office, the mill, the factory, to start fresh with the infinite number 1 of each day.  Friend, we had the time so our thirst could be satisfied, the ancestral longing to enumerate things and total them, reducing them until rendering them dust, dunes of numbers. We are papering the world with figures and ciphers, but the things existed nonetheless, fleeing all tallies, becoming dehydrated by such quantities, leaving their fragrance and memories, and the empty numbers remained.  For that reason, for you I love the things. The numbers which go to jail, move in closed columns procreating until they give us the sum for the whole of infinity. For your sake I want some numbers of the way to defend you and you to defend them. May your weekly wages increase and grow chest-deep! And out of the number 2 that binds your body and your beloved wife's emerge the matches eyes of your sons to tally yet again the ancient stars and innumerable spikes of wheat which shall fulfill the transfigured earth. |

***Ode to the Hummingbird by Pablo Neruda***

The hummingbird  
in flight  
is a water-spark,  
an incandescent drip  
of American  
fire,  
the jungle's  
flaming resume,  
a heavenly,  
precise  
rainbow:  
the hummingbird is  
an arc,  
a golden  
thread,  
a green  
bonfire!

Oh  
tiny  
living  
lightning,  
when  
you hover  
in the air,  
you are  
a body of pollen,  
a feather  
or hot coal,  
I ask you:  
What is your substance?  
Perhaps during the blind age  
of the Deluge,  
within fertility's  
mud,  
when the rose  
crystallized  
in an anthracite fist,  
and metals matriculated  
each one in  
a secret gallery  
perhaps then  
from a wounded reptile  
some fragment rolled,  
a golden atom,  
the last cosmic scale,  
a drop of terrestrial fire  
took flight,  
suspending your splendor,  
your iridescent,  
swift sapphire.

You doze  
on a nut,  
fit into a diminutive blossom;  
you are an arrow,  
a pattern,  
a coat-of-arms,  
honey's vibrato, pollen's ray;  
you are so stouthearted--  
the falcon  
with his black plumage  
does not daunt you:  
you pirouette,  
a light within the light,  
air within the air.  
Wrapped in your wings,  
you penetrate the sheath  
of a quivering flower,  
not fearing  
that her nuptial honey  
may take off your head!

From scarlet to dusty gold,  
to yellow flames,  
to the rare  
ashen emerald,  
to the orange and black velvet  
of our girdle gilded by sunflowers,  
to the sketch  
like  
amber thorns,  
your Epiphany,  
little supreme being,  
you are a miracle,  
shimmering  
from torrid California  
to Patagonia's whistling,  
bitter wind.  
You are a sun-seed,  
plumed  
fire,  
a miniature  
flag  
in flight,  
a petal ofsilenced nations,  
a syllable  
of buried blood,  
a feather  
of an ancient heart,  
submerged.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| |  | | --- | | **Ode to the Book** by Pablo Neruda | |  |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | When I close a book I open life. I hear faltering cries among harbours. Copper ignots slide down sand-pits to Tocopilla. Night time. Among the islands our ocean throbs with fish, touches the feet, the thighs, the chalk ribs of my country. The whole of night clings to its shores, by dawn it wakes up singing as if it had excited a guitar.  The ocean's surge is calling. The wind calls me and Rodriguez calls, and Jose Antonio-- I got a telegram from the "Mine" Union and the one I love (whose name I won't let out) expects me in Bucalemu.  No book has been able to wrap me in paper, to fill me up with typography, with heavenly imprints or was ever able to bind my eyes, I come out of books to people orchards with the hoarse family of my song, to work the burning metals or to eat smoked beef by mountain firesides. I love adventurous books, books of forest or snow, depth or sky but hate the spider book  in which thought has laid poisonous wires to trap the juvenile and circling fly. Book, let me go. I won't go clothed in volumes, I don't come out of collected works, my poems have not eaten poems-- they devour exciting happenings, feed on rough weather, and dig their food out of earth and men. I'm on my way with dust in my shoes free of mythology: send books back to their shelves, I'm going down into the streets. I learned about life from life itself, love I learned in a single kiss and could teach no one anything except that I have lived with something in common among men, when fighting with them, when saying all their say in my song. | |  |

Ode to the Table by Pablo Neruda

I work out my odes

on a four-legged table,

laying before me bread and wine

and roast meat

(that black boat

of our dreams).

Sometimes I set our scissors, cups and nails,

hammers and carnations.

Tables are trustworthy:

titanic quadrupeds,

they sustain

our hopes and our daily life.

The rich man’s table,

scrolled and shining,

is

a fabulous ship

bearing bunches of fruit.

Gluttony’s table is a wonder,

piled high with Gothic lobsters,

and there is also a lonesome

table in our aunt’s dining room,

in summer. They’ve closed

the curtains,

and a single ray of summer light

strikes like a sword

upon this table sitting in the dark

and greets the plums’ transparent peace.

And there is a faraway table, a humble table,

where they’re weaving

a wreath

for

a dead miner.

That table gives off the chilling odor

of a man’s wasted pain.

There’s a table

in a shadowy room nearby

that love sets ablaze with its flames.

A woman’s glove was left behind there,

trembling like a husk on fire.

The world

is a table

engulfed in honey and smoke,

smothered by apples and blood.

The table is already set,

and we know the truth

as soon as we are called:

whether we’re called to war or to dinner

we will have to choose sides,

have to know

how we’ll dress

to sit

at the long table,

whether we’ll wear the pants of hate

or the shirt of love, freshly laundered.

It’s time to decide,

they're calling:

boys and girls,

let’s eat!

Ode to the Guitar by Pablo Neruda

Slender,

perfect profile

of a musical heart,

you are clarity itself captured in flight.

Through song you endure:

your shape alone will never pass away.

Is it the harsh grief

that pours out to you,

your thrumming beats, or the

buzzing of wings:

is that what I’ll recall?

Or are you

more thoroughly thrilling

in silence,

the dove schematized

or a woman’s hip,

a pattern that emerges

from its foam

and reappears: a turgid, tumbled

and resurrected rose.

Beneath a fig tree,

by the rough-running river Bio-Bio,

you left your nest like a bird,

guitar,

and delivered

to swarthy

hands

those long-lost trysts,

muffled sobs,

and endless successions of farewells.

Song poured out of you,

a marriage

between man

and guitar,

forgotten kisses

from an unforgettable, unforgiving lady.

In this way the entire night

became

the star-studded body

of a guitar.

The firmament trembled

in its musical canopy,

while the river

tuned

its infinite strings,

sweeping toward the sea

a pure tide

of scents and sorrows.

O rich solitude,

that arrives with the night,

solitude like the bread made of earth,

solitude sung by a river of guitars!

The world shrinks

to a single drop

of honey, or one star,

and through the leaves everything is blue:

trembling, all of heaven

sings.

And the woman who plays

both earth and guitar

bears in her voice

the mourning

and the joy

of the most poignant moment.

Time and distance

fall away from the guitar.

We are a dream,

an unfinished

song.

The untamed heart

rides back roads on horseback:

over and over again it dreams of the night, of silence,

over and over again it sings of the earth, or its guitar.

Ode to a Violin in California by Pablo Neruda

One day I fell like a stone

upon the California

coast, on my own and out of luck.

Morning came, a yellow whiplash,

and evening a gust of wind.

Night came

like an immaculate bowl

overflowing with stars and newness.

O pregnant

sky, blue sculpture’s

breast trembling

above Mexico’s borders,

and on the shore

alone there with

only the wayfarer’s sadness,

a withered stick all along,

wrung out and blistered,

washed up

on California’s sinister salt shore

by the tide’s whim.

Suddenly the voice of a violin,

thin

and hungry,

floated

on the evening air

like a stray dog’s

howling.

It mourned for me, it sought me out:

it was

my companion,

it was mankind howling,

it was someone else’s loneliness loose upon the sand.

I sought that violin in the night.

I searched street by pitch-black street,

went house by weathered house,

star by star.

It faded

and fell silent

then suddenly surged

a flare

in the brackish night.

It was a pattern of incendiary sound,

a spiral of musical contours,

and I went on searching

street by street

for the dark violin’s

lifeline,

the source submerged in silence.

Finally, there

he was,

at the entrance to a bar:

a man and his

hungry violin.

The last drunk

weaved homeward

to a bunk on board a ship,

and violated tables

shrugged off empty glasses.

Nobody was left waiting,

And nobody was on the way.

The wine had left for home,

the beer was sound asleep,

and in the doorway

soared

the violin with its ragged

companion,

it soared

over the lonely night,

on a solitary scale

sounding of silver and complaint,

a single theme that wrung

from the sky

wandering fire, comets, and troubadors,

and I played my violin

half asleep,

held fast in the estuary’s

mouth, the strings

giving birth to those desolate

cries,

the wood worn smooth

by the plunging of many fingers.

I honored the smoothness, the feel

of a perfect instrument, perfectly assembled.

That hungry man’s violin

was like family to me,

like kin,

and not just because of its sound,

not just because it raised

its howling

to the angry stars,

no: because it had grown up

learning

how to befriend lost souls

and sing songs to wandering strangers.

**Ode to the Dog by Pablo Neruda**

The dog is asking me a question

and I have no answer.

He dashes through the countryside and asks me

Wordlessly,

and his eyes

are two moist question marks, two wet

inquiring flames,

but I do not answer

because I haven’t got the answer.

I have nothing to say.

Dog and man: together we roam

the open countryside.

Leaves shine as

if someone

had kissed them

one by one,

orange trees

rise up from the earth

raising

minute planetariums

in trees that are as rounded

and green as the night,

while we roam together, dog and man

sniffing everything, jostling clover

in the countryside of Chile,

cradled by the bright fingers of September.

The dog makes stops,

chases bees,

leaps over restless water,

listens to far-off

barking,

pees on a rock,

and presents me the tip of his snout

as if it were a gift:

it is the freshness of his love,

his message of love.

And he asks me

with both eyes:

why is it daytime? why does night always fall?

why does spring bring

nothing

in its basket

for wandering dogs

but useless flowers,

flowers and more flowers?

This is how the dog

asks questions

and I do not reply.

Together we roam,

man and dog bound together again

by the bright green morning,

by the provocative empty solitude

in which we alone

exist,

this union of dog and dew

or poet and woods.

For these two companions,

for these fellow-hunters,

there is no lurking fowl

or secret berry

but only birdsong and sweet smells,

a world moistened

by night’s distillations,

a green tunnel and then

a meadow,

a gust of orangey air,

the murmurings of roots,

life on the move,

breathing and growing,

and the ancient friendship,

the joy

of being dog or being man

fused

in a single beast

that pads along on

six feet,

wagging

its dew-wet tail.

Ode to a Box of Tea by Pablo Neruda

Box of tea

from

elephant country,

now a worn

sewing box,

small planetarium of buttons:

you brought

into the house

a sacred,

unplaceable scent,

as if you had come from another planet.

With you my weary young heart

arrived from far-off places,

returning

from the islands.

I had lain sweating

with fever

by the ocean shore, while a

palm frond

waved back and forth above me,

soothing

my emotions

with its green air and song.

Exquisite

tin box,

oh

how you remind me of

the swell of other seas,

the roar

of

monsoons over Asia

when

countries

rock

like ships

at the hands of the wind

and Ceylon scatters

its scents

like a head of

storm-tossed

hair.

Box of tea,

like my

own heart

you arrived bearing

stories,

thrills,

eyes

that had held

fabulous petals in their gaze

and also, yes,

that

lost scent

of tea, of jasmine and of dreams,

that scent of wandering spring.

Ode to the Plate by Pablo Neruda

Plate,

world's

most vital disk,

planet and planetarium:

at noon, when

the sun, itself a plate of fire,

crowns

the

height

of day,

your stars

appear, plate,

upon

the tables of the world,

constellations

in abundance,

and the world

fills with food, and the universe

fills with fragrance,

until work

reclaims

the workers,

and once again

the dining car is empty,

while the plates return

to the depths of the kitchen.

Smooth, perfect vessel,

you were spawned by a spring on a stone.

Then the human hand

duplicated

that perfect hollow

and the potter copied its freshness

so that

time with its thread

could insert it

forever

between every man and his life:

one plate, two plates, three . . .

ceramic hope,

sacred bowl,

moonlight precise within its halo,

rounded beauty of a diadem.

***Ode to the Present by Pablo Neruda***

This   
present moment,  
smooth  
as a wooden slab,  
this  
immaculate hour,  
this day  
pure  
as a new cup  
from the past--  
no spider web  
exists--  
with our fingers,  
we caress  
the present;

we cut it  
according to our magnitude  
we guide  
the unfolding of its blossoms.  
It is living,  
alive--  
it contains   
nothing  
from the unrepairable past,  
from the lost past,  
it is our  
infant,  
growing at  
this very moment, adorned with  
sand, eating from  
our hands.  
Grab it.  
Don't let it slip away.  
Don't lose it in dreams  
or words.  
Clutch it.  
Tie it,  
and order it  
to obey you.  
Make it a road,  
a bell,  
a machine,  
a kiss, a book,  
a caress.   
Take a saw to its delicious  
wooden  
perfume.  
And make a chair;  
braid its  
back;  
test it.  
Or then, build  
a staircase!

Yes, a  
staircase.  
Climb  
into  
the present,  
step  
by step,  
press your feet  
onto the resinous wood  
of this moment,  
going up,  
going up,  
not very high,  
just so  
you repair   
the leaky roof.  
Don't go all the way to heaven.  
Reach  
for apples,  
not the clouds.  
Let them  
fluff through the sky,  
skimming passage,  
into the past.

You  
are  
your present,  
your own apple.  
Pick it from  
your tree.  
Raise it  
in your hand.  
It's gleaming,  
rich with stars.  
Claim it.  
Take a luxurious bite  
out of the present,  
and whistle along the road  
of your destiny.

**Ode to the Air**

**By Pablo Neruda**  
  
Walking down a path  
I met the air,  
saluted it and said  
respectfully:  
“It makes me happy  
that for once  
you left your transparency,  
let’s talk.”  
He tirelessly  
danced, moved leaves,  
beat the dust   
from my soles  
with his laughter,  
and lifting all   
his blue rigging,  
his skeleton of glass,  
his eyelids’ breeze,  
immobile as a mast  
he stood listening to me.  
I kissed the cape  
of heaven’s king,  
I wrapped myself  
in his flag of sky  
blue silk  
and said:  
king and comrade,  
needle, corolla, bird,  
I don’t know who you are but  
I ask one thing –  
don’t sell yourself.  
The water sold itself   
and from the desert’s  
distilleries  
I’ve seen  
the last drops  
terminate  
and the poor world, the people  
walking with their thirst  
staggering in the sand.  
I saw the light  
at night  
rationed,  
the great light in the house  
of the rich.  
All is dawn in the  
new hanging gardens,  
all is dark  
in the terrible  
shadow of the valley.  
From there, the night,  
mother step mother,  
goes out with a dagger in the midst  
of her owl’s eyes,  
and a scream, a crime,  
arises and extinguishes,  
swallowed by shadow.  
No, air,  
don’t sell yourself,  
don’t be channeled,  
don’t be entubed,  
don’t be boxed,  
compressed,  
don’t be stamped out in pills,  
don’t be bottled,  
be careful!  
Call  
when you need me,  
I am the poet son  
of the poor, brother  
in flesh and brother   
in law   
of the poor, of everywhere,  
of my country and all the others,  
of the poor who live on the river,  
of those who live in the heights  
of the vertical mountains,  
break rock,  
nail boards,  
sew clothes,  
cut wood,  
haul earth,  
and for this   
I want them to breathe,   
you are all they have,  
this is why  
you are  
invisible,  
so they can see  
what tomorrow brings,  
for this  
you exist,  
air,  
catch your breath,  
don’t shackle yourself,  
don’t fix yourself to anyone  
who comes in a car  
to examine you,  
leave them,  
laugh at them,  
flee from them through the shadows,  
don’t accept   
their propositions,  
we’ll go together  
dancing through the world,  
knocking the blossoms  
from the apple trees,  
entering windows,  
whistling  
melodies  
from yesterday and tomorrow,  
already  
the day is coming  
when we will liberate  
the light and the water,  
earth and men,  
and all will be  
for all, as you are.  
For this, for now,  
be careful!  
And come with me,  
much remains  
that dances and sings,  
let’s go  
the length of the sea,  
to the height of the mountains,  
let’s go   
where the new spring  
is flowering  
and in one gust of wind  
and song  
we’ll share the flowers,  
the scent, the fruit,  
the air  
of tomorrow.

Ode to the Sea

By Pablo Neruda trans. by *Linh Dinh*

Here on the island  
the sea  
and so much sea  
overflowing,  
relentless,  
it says yes, then no,  
then no, no, no,  
then yes, in blue,  
in foam, with gallops,  
it says no, again no.  
It cannot stay still,  
my name is sea, it repeats  
while slamming against rocks  
but unable to convince rocks,  
then  
with seven green tongues  
of seven green dogs,  
of seven green tigers,  
of seven green seas,  
it smothers rocks, kisses rocks,  
drenches rocks  
and slamming its chest,  
repeats its name.  
O sea, you declare yourself,  
O comrade ocean,  
don’t waste time and water,  
don’t beat yourself up,  
help us,  
we are lowly  
fishermen,  
men of the shore,  
we’re cold and hungry  
and you’re the enemy,  
don’t slam so hard,  
don’t scream like that,  
open your green trunk  
and give all of us  
on our hands  
your silver gifts:  
fish every day.  
  
Here in each house,  
we all crave it  
whether it’s of silver,  
crystal or moonlight,  
spawn for the poor  
kitchens on earth.  
Don’t hoard it,  
you miser,  
coldly rushing like  
wet lightning  
beneath your waves.  
Come, now,  
open yourself  
and leave it  
near our hands,  
help us, ocean,  
deep green father,  
end one day  
our earthly poverty.  
Let us  
harvest your lives’  
endless plantation,  
your wheat and eggs,  
your oxes, your metals,  
the wet splendor  
and submerged fruits.  
  
Father sea, we know already  
what you are called, all  
the seagulls circulate  
your name on the beaches:  
now, behave yourself,  
don’t shake you mane,  
don’t threaten anyone,  
don’t smash against the sky  
your beautiful teeth,  
ignore for a moment  
your glorious history,  
give to every man,  
to every  
woman and to every child,  
a fish large or small  
every day.  
Go out to every street  
in the world  
and distribute fish  
and then   
scream,  
scream  
so all the working poor  
could hear you,  
so they could say,  
sticking their heads  
into the mine:  
“Here comes the old man sea  
to distribute fish.”  
And they’ll go back down  
into the darkness,  
smiling, and on the streets  
and in the forests,  
men and the earth  
will smile  
an oceanic smile.  
But  
if you don’t want it,  
if you don’t care for it,  
then wait,  
wait for us,  
we must worry, first  
we must try to solve  
and straighten out  
human affairs,  
the biggest problems first,  
then all the others,  
and then  
we’ll enter you,  
we’ll chop the waves  
with a knife made of fire,  
on an electric horse  
leaping over foam,  
singing  
we’ll sink  
until we touch the bottom  
of your guts,  
an atomic thread  
will guard your shank,  
we’ll plant  
in your deep garden  
trees  
of cement and steel,  
we’ll tie  
your hands and feet,  
on your skin man will walk,  
spitting,  
yanking in bunches,  
building armatures,  
mounting and taming you  
to dominate your spirit.  
All this will occur  
when us men  
have straighten out  
our problem,  
the big,  
the big problem.  
We’ll slowly  
solve everything:  
we’ll force you, sea,  
we’ll force you, earth  
perform miracles,  
because in our very selves,  
in the struggle,  
is fish, is bread,  
is the miracle.

**Ode to the Book**

 By Pablo Neruda

**When I close a book  
I open life.  
I hear  
faltering cries  
among harbours.  
Copper ignots  
slide down sand-pits  
to Tocopilla.  
Night time.  
Among the islands  
our ocean  
throbs with fish,  
touches the feet, the thighs,  
the chalk ribs  
of my country.  
The whole of night  
clings to its shores, by dawn  
it wakes up singing  
as if it had excited a guitar.  
  
The ocean's surge is calling.  
The wind  
calls me  
and Rodriguez calls,  
and Jose Antonio--  
I got a telegram  
from the "Mine" Union  
and the one I love  
(whose name I won't let out)  
expects me in Bucalemu.  
  
No book has been able  
to wrap me in paper,  
to fill me up  
with typography,  
with heavenly imprints  
or was ever able  
to bind my eyes,  
I come out of books to people orchards  
with the hoarse family of my song,  
to work the burning metals  
or to eat smoked beef  
by mountain firesides.  
I love adventurous  
books,  
books of forest or snow,  
depth or sky  
but hate  
the spider book   
in which thought  
has laid poisonous wires  
to trap the juvenile  
and circling fly.  
Book, let me go.  
I won't go clothed  
in volumes,  
I don't come out  
of collected works,  
my poems  
have not eaten poems--  
they devour  
exciting happenings,  
feed on rough weather,  
and dig their food  
out of earth and men.  
I'm on my way  
with dust in my shoes  
free of mythology:  
send books back to their shelves,  
I'm going down into the streets.  
I learned about life  
from life itself,  
love I learned in a single kiss  
and could teach no one anything  
except that I have lived  
with something in common among men,  
when fighting with them,  
when saying all their say in my song.**

Ode to Typography

Entangled Gutenberg:

the house with spiders,in darkness,

Suddenly,a letter of gold enters through the

window.

Thus printing was born…

Letters,

long, severe, vertical,

made of pure line,

erect like a ship’s mast in the middle of

the page’s sea of confusion and turbulence;

algebraic Bodoni,

upright letters,

trim as whippets

subjected to the white rectangle of geometry;

Elzevirian vowels

stamped in the minute steel of the printshop

by the water,

in Flanders, in the channeled North ciphers

of the anchor;

characters of Aldus,

firm as the marine stature of Venice,

in whose mother waters,

like a leaning sail,

navigates the cursive curving the alphabet:

the air of the oceanic discoverers slanted

forever,

the profile of writing.

From medieval hands to your eye

advanced this N,

this double 8 this J,

this r of rey and rocio.

There they were wrought,

much as teeth, nails,

metallic hammers of language:

they beat each letter, erected it,

a small black statue on the whiteness,

a petal or a starry foot of thought

taking the form of a mighty river,

finding its way to the sea of nations

with the entire alphabet

illuminating the estuary.

The paper’s eyes,

eyes which looked

at men seeking their gifts,

their history,their loves;

extending the accumulated treasure;

suddenly spreading the slowness of wisdom

on the table like a deck of cards.

All the secret humus of the ages,

song,memory,revolt,blind parable,

suddenly were fecundity,granary,letters,

letters that traveled and kindled,

letters that sailed and conquered,

letters that awakened and climbed,

letters dove-shaped that flew,

letters scarlet on the snow,

punctuation,roads,building of letters.

Yet,when writing displays its rose gardens

and the letter its essential cultivation,

when you read the old and the new words,

the truths and the explorations,

I beg a thought

for the one who sets type,

for the linotypist with his lamp

like a pilot over the waves of language

ordering winds and foam,

shadow and stars in the book:

man and steel once more united

against the nocturnal wing of mystery,

sailing,researching,composing.

Typography,

let me celebrate you

in the purity of your pure profiles,

in the vessel of the letter O,

in the flesh flower vase of the Y,

in the Q of Quevedo,

(how can my poetry

pass before that letter

and not feel

the ancient shiver of the dying sage?)

in the lily multi multiplied

of the V of victory,

in the E

escalated to climb to heaven,

in the Z

with its thunderbolt face,

in the near-orange P.

Love,

I love the letters of your hair,

the U of your look,

the S of your figure.

My love,

your hair surrounds me

as jungle or dictionary

with its profused red language.

In everything,

in the wake of the worm,one reads,

in the rose,one reads,

the roots are filled with letters

twisted by the dampness of the forest

and in the heavens of Isla Negra,

in the night,I read,

read in the coast’s cold firmament,

intense,diaphanous with beauty,unfurled,

with capital and lower case stars,

and exclamation points of frozen diamonds.

Yet the letter was not beauty alone,

but life,

peace for the soldier;

it went down to the solitudes of the mine,

and the miner read the hard and clandestine

flyer,

hid it in the folds of the secret heart and

above,

on earth he became another

and another was his word.

Typography,

I am only a poet

and you are the flowery play of reason,

the movement of the chess bishops of intelligence

You rest neither at night nor in winter,

you circulate in the veins of our anatomy

and if you do sleep or fly away during the

night

or strike or fatigue or breakage of linotype,

you descend anew to the book or newspaper

like a cloud or birds to their nest.

You return to the system,

to the inevitable order of intelligence.

Letters!

continue to fall

like precise rain along my way.

Letters of all that lives and dies,

letters of light,

off moon,of silence of water,

I love you,

and in you

I gather not only thought and combat,

but your dress,senses and sounds:

A of glorious avena,

T of trigo and torre

and M

like your name of manzana.

Ode to the Atom

by Pablo Neruda trans. by Margaret Sayers Peden

Infinitesimal

star,

you seemed

forever

buried

in metal, hidden,

your diabolic

fire.

One day

someone knocked

at your tiny

door:

it was man.

With one

explosion

he unchained you,

you saw the world,

you came out

into the daylight,

you traveled through

cities,

your great brilliance

illuminated lives,

you were a

terrible fruit

of electric beauty,

you came to

hasten the flames

of summer,

and then

wearing

a predator’s eyeglasses,

armor,

and a checked shirt,

sporting sulfuric mustaches

and a prehensile tail,

came

the warrior

and seduced you:

sleep,

he told you,

curl up,

atom, you resemble

a Greek god,

a Parisian modiste

in springtime,

lie down here

on my fingernail,

climb into this little box,

and then

the warrior

put you in his jacket

as if you were nothing but

a North American

pill,

and he traveled through the world

and dropped you

on Hiroshima.

We awakened.

The dawn

had been consumed.

All the birds

burned to ashes.

An odor

of coffins,

gas from tombs,

thundered through space.

The shape of punishment arose,

hideous,

superhuman,

bloody mushroom dome,

cloud of smoke,

sword

of hell.

Burning air arose,

spreading death

on parallel waves,

reaching

the mother sleeping

with her child,

the river fisherman

and the fish,

the bakery

and the bread,

the engineer

and his buildings;

everything

was acid

dust,

assassin

air.

The city

crumbled its last honeycombs

and fell, fell suddenly,

demolished,

rotten;

men

were instant lepers,

they took

their children’s hand

and the little hand

fell off in theirs.

So, from your refuge

in the secret

mantle of stone

in which fire slept

they took you,

blinding spark,

raging light,

to destroy lives,

to threaten distant existences,

beneath the sea,

in the air,

on the sands,

in every twist and turn

of the ports,

to destroy

seeds,

to kill cells,

to stunt the corolla,

they destined you, atom,

to level

nations,

to turn love into a black pustule,

to burn heaped-up hearts

and annihilate blood.

Mad spark,

go back

to your shroud,

bury yourself

in your mineral mantle,

be blind stone once again,

ignore the outlaws,

and collaborate

with life, with growing things,

replace motors,

elevate energy,

fertilize planets.

You have no secret

now,

walk

among men

without your terrible

mask,

pick up your pace

and pace

the picking of the fruit,

parting

mountains,

straightening rivers,

making fertile,

atom,

overflowing

cosmic

cup,

return

to the peace of the vine,

to the velocity of joy,

return to the province

of nature,

place yourself at our service,

and instead of the fatal

ashes

of your mask,

instead of the unleashed infernos

of your wrath,

instead of the menace

of your terrible light, deliver to us

your amazing

rebelliousness

for our grain,

your unchained magnetism

to found peace among men,

and then your dazzling light

will be happiness,

not hell,

hope of morning,

gift to earth.

Ode to Clouds

by Pablo Neruda trans. by Ken Krabbenhoft

Clouds of southern skies,

winged clouds,

clouds

of whitest steam , heaven’s clothing,

petals, perfect fish

of summertime:

you are heavenly girls

lying on your backs in grass and on beaches

of spreading sky,

silk in sunlight, white springtime,

the sky’s childhood.

Splashed across the heavens, rushing by

lofted

lightly

on air,

giant feathers

of light, nests

of water,

and now a single

filament

of flame or rage

ignites

meadows

of sky

and blooming

almond trees.

Every equinox

this laundry

is devoured

by green

leopards,

slashed by scimitars,

attacked by

fire

hydrants.

Clouds that arrive on time

but without hope

for the sun’s

daily

demise,

the whole

horizon’s

ritual dance:

no sooner

have sluggish seabirds

crossed this space, flying

above the view,

than clouds are ripped apart,

light from this frenzied fan

falls apart,

there is no more life or fire: they were simply

the sky’s celebration.

But for you, swollen

storm cloud, I am holding

that space

over mountain and sea, that space of shadows,

of panic and darkness above the world.

And whether you stand above sheaves

of sea spray

in the ocean’s

outraged night,

or above the muted mane

of nocturnal forests,

you, cloud, shed

a steely ink

and cotton puffs of mourning in which

the pale stars drown.

Darkness falls

from your umbrella

with the heaviness of lead, then

electrified water and smoke

tremble like dark

flags, shaken

by fear.

You water

your darkness

and join it to the sleep

of black roots:

this is how earth’s splendor

emerges to sparkle

again

after storms.

Spring’s

cloud, fragrant

vessel, perfect

lily

of heaven,

unfortunate widow’s cloak,

black mother of thunder:

I want a suit of clouds,

a shirt

of your substance.

Sweep me along the edge

of light, or mount me

on a steed of shadow

to race the length of the sky.

Thus will I touch reefs and forests,

scale waterfalls and cities,

peer into the world’s secret heart,

and when I’m done I’ll return

to earth with the rain,

and commune quietly with roots.

Ode to Fire

by Pablo Neruda trans. by Ken Krabbenhoft

Wild-haired fire,

Jumpy

and blind but studded with eyes,

sassy,

tardy, and unpredictable,

golden star,

thief of wood,

silent outlaw,

cooker of onions,

renowned swindler cloaked in sparks,

rabid dog with a million teeth:

hear me

heart of hearths,

bush of undying roses,

destroyer of lives,

heavenly father of bread and ovens,

famous forefather

of wheels and instruments,

breeder of metals,

refiner of steel,

fire,

hear me.

Your name crackles with flame:

it's a pleasure

to say “fire,”

much better

than “stone”

or “grain.”

Words seem lifeless

next to your yellow blaze

next to your red tail,

next to your bright amaranth mane.

Words are simply cold.

We say “fire”—

fire! fire! fire!—

and there’s something

burning in our mouth:

it’s your fruit that burns,

it’s your laurel that crackles.

But you’re not

just a word,

though words

entirely lacking

in flame

shake loose and fall

from the tree of time.

You are

flower,

fancy,

consummation, embrace,

and elusive substance.

You are violence and destruction,

secrecy, stormy

wing of death and life,

creation and ashes alike.

You are a dazzling spark,

a sword covered with eyes,

you are eminence,

autumn or sudden summer,

gunpowder’s dry thunder,

collapse of mountain ranges,

river of smoke,

obscurity and silence.

Where are you, where have you gone?

There’s nothing left of your bonfires

but drifting dust

and, on our hands, burn marks

or the imprint of flowers.

In the end I’ve found you

on the blank page in front of me.

I’ll make myself sing your praise,

fire,

right now,

before my very eyes.

Keep

quiet while I search

the closets for my lyre,

also the camera

with the black lightning bolts,

so I can take your picture.

In the end you

stay with me

not to do me in,

not so I can make you

light my pipe,

but so I can touch you,

smooth your hair—every

dangerous strand—

so I can spruce you up or wound you,

so you’ll have the courage

to charge me,

scarlet bull.

Go ahead,

burn me

now,

flare

into my song,

course

through my veins,

exit

through my mouth.

Now

you know:

you’re no match

for me.

I’m turning you into song,

I can feel you up and down,

trap you into syllables of my making.

I’ll put you in shackles, order you

to whistle

or melt away in trills

as if you were

a caged canary.

I’m not impressed

by your famous firebird

tunic from hell.

Here

you're condemned

to life and death.

If I fall silent

you vanish.

If I sing

you melt away,

giving me all the light I need.

Of all

my friends

and

enemies,

you’re

the hardest to handle.

Everybody else

carries you tied up,

a demon in their pockets,

a hurricane locked away

in boxes and decrees.

But not me.

I carry you right alongside me,

and I’m telling you this:

it’s high time

you showed me

what you can do.

Open up, let down

your tangled

hair,

leap up and singe

the heights of heaven.

Show me

your green and orange

body,

raise

your flags,

crackle

on the surface of the earth

or right here by my side, as calm

as a pale topaz.

Look at me, then go to sleep.

Climb the stairs

on your multitude of feet.

Chase me,

come alive

so I can write you down,

so you can sing

with my words

in your own way,

burning.

Ode to Rain

by Pablo Neruda trans. by Ken Krabbenhoft

The rain returned.

It didn’t come from the sky

or out of the West:

it came straight from my childhood.

Night split open, a peal of thunder

rattled, the racket

swept every lonely corner,

and then

the rain came,

rain returning

from my childhood,

first

a raging

gust,

then

a planet’s

soggy

tail.

The rain

goes ticktock, a thousand ticks

a thousand

tocks, a sleigh

or an ample burst

of dark petals

in the night,

suddenly

intense,

riddling

the leaves

with needles;

other times it’s

a stormy

cloak

drifting down

in silence.

Rain,

sea of the upper air,

fresh,

naked rose,

voice of the sky,

black violin,

sheer beauty:

I have loved you

since childhood

not for your goodness

but for your beauty.

I trudged along

in my ruined shoes

while threads

of streaming sky

unraveled over

my head,

bringing

a message

from on high,

to me and to roots,

humid oxygen,

freedom of the forest.

I know

how mischievous you can be,

the hole

in the roof

dripping

measured drops

on poor peoples’

rooms.

That’s when you rip off the mask

of beauty,

when you’re as mean

as

heavenly

armor

or a dagger of transparent

glass.

That’s where

I really came to know you.

But   
I was

still

yours

in love,

in the night,

shutting my eyes tight,

I hoped you would fall

on the world.

I hoped you would sing

for my ears alone,

because my heart cradled

the earth’s sprouting,

in my heart metals merge,

wheat springs out of my heart.

But loving you still

left a bitter taste

in my mouth,

the bitter aftertaste of regret.

Just last night,

here in Santiago,

houses

in Nueva Legua

collapsed,

fragile

mushrooms,

heaps

of humiliation.

Because of your heavy footsteps

they fell,

children

cried in the mire

and day after day

in rain-soaked beds,

on shattered chairs,

the women,

bonfires for kitchens

while you, black rain,

enemy rain,

kept on falling

on our misery.

I believe

that some day—

a day we will mark on calendars—

they will live under sound roofs,

dry roofs,

men with their dreams,

everyone

who sleeps,

and when in the middle of the night

the rain

returns

from my childhood,

it will sing

for other children to hear,

and the song

of rain falling on the world

will be joyous.

It will be industrious, too,

and proletarian,

absorbed

in fertilizing mountains

and plains,

revitalizing rivers,

festooning

collapsed gullies

forgotten in the hills,

hard at work

in the ice

of gale-force

winds,

dancing on the backs

of cattle,

fortifying spring seeds

of wheat,

bathing secretive

almond trees,

working

at full steam

and with elusive subtlety,

all hands and threads,

on earth’s preparations.

Rain

from yesterday,

O sad

rain

of Lonocoche and Temuco,

sing,

sing,

sing on rooftops

and in leaves,

sing in freezing winds,

sing in my heart, in my trust,

on my roof, in my veins,

sing in my whole life.

I’m no longer scared of you:

go on, slide down

toward the earth

singing your song

and mine.

We’ve got to get to work

with these seeds.

We’ll share

our duties singing.

Ode to Peace and Quiet

by Pablo Neruda trans. by Ken Krabbenhoft

Deep

restfulness,

still

water,

bright peaceful shade:

emerging

from the fray, the way

lakes emerge from waterfalls,

merciful reward,

perfect petal.

I lie

face up

and watch

the sky stream by.

Its deep blue mass

slides past.

Where

is it headed,

with its fish, its islands

and estuaries?

Above me

the sky,

below me

the rustling

of a desiccated rose.

Small things

fidget, insects

flit by like numbers:

this is the earth,

roots

are at work

down below,

minerals

and water

seep into

our bodies

and germinate inside us.

Lying there motionless,

that day beneath the tree,

we knew nothing of this:

the leaves were all talking,

trading

news of other trees,

stories about their homeland,

about trees.

Some still remember

the leopard’s

stealthy shape

moving like solid

mist

through their branches;

others recall

snow whipped by gales,

the storm season’s

scepter.

We should

let all mouths

speak,

not just

trees:

we should sit still in the midst

of this incalculable song.

Nothing on earth lacks a voice:

When we close

our eyes

we hear

things that slither,

creatures that are growing,

the creaking

of unseen wood,

and then

the world,

earth, heavenly waters,

air:

everything sounds

like thunder, at times,

other times

like a distant river.

Peace and quiet, a moment’s

rest, or a day’s:

from your depths we will gather

minerals,

from your unspeaking face

musical light will issue.

This is how we’ll perfect our actions.

This is how men and women will speak

the earth’s conviction, and never know it.

Ode to Energy

by Pablo Neruda trans. by Ken Krabbenhoft

Your black-leafed plant

seemed to slumber

within the heart of coal.

Later,

released,

it stirred,

surged forward,

became

a mad tongue

of fire.

It dwelt inside

locomotives

and steamships,

red rose hidden away,

entrails of steel.

And you, coming straight

from the secret

black

shafts, blind—

you gave yourself up.

Engines,

wheels,

and machinery,

movement,

light, shuddering

and sounds

began pouring

out of you, energy,

mother energy.

You gave birth to them

in spasms,

you singed the firebox

and the blue stoker’s

hands,

you annihilated distance

howling howling

in your cage,

and there, where you

burned yourself up,

in that place touched by your fire,

clusters of fruit also arrived,

windows

multiplied,

pages came together like feathers,

and the wings of books took flight.

Men were born and trees fell to the ground,

and the soil was fertile.

Energy, in a grape’s shape

you are fat drops

of sugar dressed in mourning,

a transparent

planet,

liquid flame, sphere

of frenzied purple.

You are also repeated

seeds of spice,

wheat germ,

cereal star, living

lodestone and living steel, towers

hung with humming wires,

waters in motion,

taut

silent

dove

of energy source

of beings. You exalt

the little boy’s blood,

you grow like a plant that blossoms in his eyes,

you harden his hands

beating and stretching him

until he grows into a man.

Fire that rushes and sings,

water of creation,

growth itself:

change our lives,

draw

bread from stones,

gold from the sky,

cities from the desert.

Give us,

energy,

the essence you are hoarding,

project your gifts of fire

far away,

to the steppes,

forge fruits, set ablaze

treasuries of wheat,

break the soil, level

mountains, deliver

fresh

fertility

to all the earth

so that from now on,

beginning over there,

from the place where

life was transformed,

the earth will

be changed,

the whole

earth,

islands

and deserts,

and mankind, too.

The, O energy,

sword of fire,

you will cease being

our enemy:

your tamed

mane will be

all fruit and flower,

your flames

will bring peace and order,

fertility and doves,

and abundance of fruit

and fresh bread from the plains.

Ode to Envy

by Pablo Neruda trans. by Ken Krabbenhoft

I had come

from the South, from the Frontier,

where life was drizzly.

When I arrived in Santiago,

I worked hard

at dressing differently.

My clothes were made

for harsh winters.

Flowers of bad weather

covered me.

I bled myself dry changing

addresses.

Everything was used up:

even air

smelled like sadness.

Wallpaper peeled

from the walls

of cheap hotels,

but I wrote and kept on writing

in order to keep from dying.

And no sooner had

my boyish poems

of exile

burned a path

through the streets

than little Teddy barked in my ear,

and Ginger bit my leg.

I dove

into the abyss

of the poorest houses—

underneath the bed,

in the kitchen

or deep inside a closet

where nobody could probe me,

and I wrote on, simply .

to keep from dying.

It made no difference. They rose up

Threatening

my poetry

with hooks and knives

and black pliers.

So I crossed

oceans,

hating those climates

where fever whispers along the waters:

engulfed by shrill

saffron and vengeful gods,

I wandered lost in the din

of dark drums

and panting

twilights.

I buried myself alive,

then I kept on writing, simply

to keep from dying.

My home was so far away, that’s

how completely I’d let go.

But here the alligators

were sharpening

their long green rows of teeth.

I returned from my journeys,

kissed everybody hello—

kissed women, men,

and children.

I belonged, I had a homeland.

Luck was with me.

I walked arm in arm

with Joy.

From then on, at night

and in winter,

in trains and in the thick

of battle,

by seashores, in mine shafts

and in deserts, next to

the woman I loved

and on the run from

police,

I wrote simple poems

for all mankind,

to keep from dying.

And now

they're back:

they’re as dogged

as earthworms,

as invisible

as rats

on a ship.

They sail

where I sail,

and if I’m careless they nip at

my heels.

They exist because I exist.

What can I do?

What else

but keep on singing

until I die.

At this point I simply

can't give in.

Maybe they’d like

a present

wrapped in pretty paper,

or an umbrella

to keep themselves dry

in the nasty rain

that arrived with me from the Frontier.

I could teach them how to ride horseback

or encourage

them to pet my dog.

But I want them to know

I cannot

wire my mouth shut

so they can write poetry

in my place.

That’s not possible.

I really can’t.

Sadly or lovingly,

in the chill of early morning,

at three in the afternoon

or in the middle of the night—

at any hour of the day—

whether I’m enraged or basking in love,

on trains and in springtime,

in the dark or as I leave

a wedding,

walking through my woods

or through my study,

at three in the afternoon

or in the middle of the night,

an any hour of the day:

I will go on writing not simply

to keep from dying

but to help

others live,

because it seems someone

needs my song.

Relentless is what I’ll be,

utterly relentless.

So I’ll beg them

to make no truce

when defending the flag of envy,

for I’ve gotten used to its teeth.

In fact I need them.

But I want them also to know

(it’s true)

that one day I will die

(I’ll have to give them

this last satisfaction).

Of this there is no doubt.

But

I will go down singing.

And I am relatively certain

(though they won’t like to hear it)

that my song

will be heard

on this side of death,

in the heart

of my country:

it will be my voice, a voice

of fire and rain,

and the voice of other people.

For it is written in fire and rain

that the truest poetry

survives

against all odds.

It outlives fear,

it has the robust health

of a milkmaid

and enough teeth in its smile

to ruin the hopes

of all the rodents in the world,

all of them put together.

Ode to My Joy

by Pablo Neruda trans. by Ken Krabbenhoft

Joy,

green leaf

resting on the window sill,

tiny

brightness

newly born,

musical elephant,

dazzling

coin,

occasional

fragile gust of wind

but

more often

everlasting bread,

hope realized,

and duty properly done:

I scorned you, joy—

I was given bad advice.

The moon

lured me along its paths.

Ancient poets

lent me their glasses

and I drew a dark halo

around everything I saw,

a black crown on every flower,

a melancholy kiss

on each pair of beloved lips.

But there’s still time.

Let me make it up to you.

I thought

the bush caught up in the storm

had only to singe

my heart,

that rain had only to drench

my clothes

in the crimson land of mourning,

that if I closed

my eyes to the rose

and caressed the open wound,

suffering my share of everyone’s pain—

that only then was I aiding my fellow man.

In this I erred.

I had lost my way,

so today I call on you, joy.

You are

as necessary

as earth.

You warm

our hearths

like fire.

You are perfect,

like bread.

You are musical,

like the water of a river.

You make gifts of honey

circulating like a bee.

Joy.

I was a moody youth:

I found your mop of hair

shocking.

But when its abundance

showered down on my chest

I discovered it wasn’t true.

Today, joy,

I ran into you on the street,

far from any book.

Come with me:

I want to go with you

house to house,

I want to go from town to town,

flag to flag.

You aren’t just for me.

We will go to islands,

and seas.

We will go to mines,

and forests.

Not only will I be greeted

by solitary woodsmen,

poor washerwomen, or gruff and stately

stonecutters,

all of them bearing your bouquets:

there will also be crowds

and gatherings,

lumberjacks and longshoremen,

and brave boys

fighting their fight.

Around the world with you

and with my song!

With the star’s

winking flight

and the sea spray’s

delight!

I will deliver them all

because to all

I owe my joy.

Let no one question why I should want

to give the world’s wonders

to all mankind:

I learned the hard way

it's my earthly duty

to spread joy—

and I do this through my song.